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ABSTRACT

The object of this study was to decode the expressive symbol systems attached to broadcasting in the 1920s and to come to an understanding of the significance of the new technology by exploring the utopian dimensions which were tacitly held by the market model, and expressed in a variety of ways by the men and women who were connected in some way to broadcasting at its birth. The market model, which determined future developments in broadcasting, implied certain utopian yearnings that were reflected in various sentiments for worldwide peace and human unity, moral perfectability, and interior (cultural) enrichment. These sentiments placed an enormous power in the hands of the burgeoning technology and revealed a desire for the world to retreat from choice, from responsibility for choice, and from the arena wherein that choice is determined and subsequently implemented: politics. Seen as an intervening force in response to change, technology became in the 1920s a symbolic representation harboring feelings of political and moral discontent. This discontent placed power in the hands of the new technology: the power to bring about peace, harmony, human perfectability, and enrichment. In such a universe, human choice would no longer be necessary. (54 references) (CGD)

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UTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN THE DISCOURSE ON BROADCASTING IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1920s*

by

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INTRODUCTION

In 1979 I began to study the discourse, written and spoken, on broadcasting in the 1920s. At the time I was suspicious of the sweeping generalizations being made about the relationship between technology and social life, particularly about literate and oral cultures in some scholarly writing (see Innis, 1951; 1972; McLuhan, 1965; Ong, 1970; 1977; Carey, 1983; Carey and Quirk, 1973; cf. Carey and Quirk, 1970; and Czitrom, 1982). For example, Ong talks of written forms of communications as a kind of "denaturing" of the word. Also, Innis displays a preference for oral cultures, which he appears to believe are morally superior to literate cultures. Yet, any study of Indo-European oral cultures, such as Homeric Greece, or of the Kabyle peasant of our time cannot fail to debunk this belief (Bourdieu 1964; 1970). Having been trained as a cultural historian, my approach to the discourse was largely Geertzian, not so much in terms of method (thick description), which is Geertz's chief weak spot (Lystra, 1983), but in terms of direction. The evidence was assumed by me to be a reflection of the informal logic of everyday life. The object of the study,

then, was to decode the expressive symbol systems attached to broadcasting at its birth and to come to an understanding of the significance attached to the new technology from the point of view of those who were connected to it, one way or another.

Further I also assumed that the myths of American culture historically had had an important impact on the formation of public policy, including policy concerning broadcasting (see Smith, 1950; Marx, 1964; cf. Kukleck, 1972; Lenz, 1982; Wise, 198 ; Hindle, 1981). Over the course of five years it gradually became clear to me that the second assumption was false: that public policy regarding broadcasting was not informed by the mythic elements of American culture. This is not to say that mythic dimensions do not appear in the discourse or that myths do not exercise any influence on public policy. My point is that the overriding influence on public policy in the case of broadcasting was precedence in the law. Further, this precedence was rooted, significantly so, in the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution and consequently the conception of a self-adjusting market had more influence than, say, the Pastoral Myth or the Myth of Individualism (Mander, 1984).

Notably, however, the notion of a self-adjusting market, as Karl Polanyi (1944) as pointed out, is starkly utopian. Thus those elements in the discourse that do reflect a utopian "explanation" of how best to regulate radio broadcasting can be examined to understand and assess the emotional significance and, more importantly, the values and politics attached to

broadcasting in the years prior to the passage of the first law governing the development and social implementation of the new technology in the U.S. This paper sets forth the discourse, written and spoken, and offers an interpretation of the significance of that discourse. Here I would like to explore the utopian dimensions tacitly held by the market model and expressed in a variety of ways by those who were connected, one way or another, to broadcasting at its birth. The argument presented in this paper is that the market model, which determined future developments in broadcasting, implied certain utopian yearnings that are reflected in various sentiments for peace, human unity, moral perfectability and interior enrichment. Further, these utopian sentiments, when examined closely, indicate that contrary to previous collective experiences of new technologies in American life (Kasson, 1976; Marx, 1964; Smith, 1950; Tractenberg, 1965), the discourse on broadcasting reveals a desire to retreat from politics. Thus, this paper offers an alternative to Czitrom's (1982) explanation about broadcasting's development and use in the U.S.: That utopian dreams connected to the wireless were undermined by commercial realities. Instead, the argument here is that utopian dreams were reflections of the market model.

Put another way, this paper is an analysis of internal structure of the social blueprints offered by some men and women in response to a new technology: Broadcasting. Three types of response are analyzed, all of which can be conceived as utopian

in the sense that they contain or at least imply some notion of paradise, an ideally perfect social order or flawlessly ordered human experience. The primary evidence for this study was comprised of the private papers of Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce and "in charge" of broadcasting, the Congressional Record, the texts of hearings before House and Senate Committees, and articles published in the popular and trade magazine press. The secondary evidence is drawn from the vast literature on the nature and structure of utopian writing and thinking. This literature is used to inform the analysis (see, among others, Brinton, 1966; Brockway, 1981; Davis, 1968; Davis, 1981; ISSJ, 1980; Dougherty, 1980; Falk, 1980; Frye, 1966; Gouldner and Peterson, 1962; Lakoff, 1981; Manuel, 1966; Marx, 1980; Parrington, 1964; Pierce, 1966; Rhodes, 1967; Ricoeur, 1979; Segal, 1980; Smith, 1950; Schwartz, 1977; Taylor, 1979). Two caveats are in order: (1) the discourse itself suggested the utopian categories I have chosen. Nowhere in the discourse itself is utopia mentioned. (2) The discourse often contains cross-over references. To avoid obfuscation and repetition, I leave it to the reader to recognize these references.

BROADCASTING AND UTOPIA

The most important and most universal political development of the last two hundred years is the growth of the centralized, bureaucratic state in both the East and the West.

The development of the sovereign state which assumes "obligations in every area of human life from health to employment, education to transport, defence to entertainment and leisure, is a feature of every advanced state" (Davis, 1981) in the world. The evolution of today's competing ideologies--liberalism and communism--pales in comparison with the growing hegemony of the state in the everyday life of its citizens. Concurrently the growth of the state's role in everyday life is at the heart of utopian writing of the last four centuries (Davis, 1981, p. 5; cf. Manuel, 1966, p. 85). In the world of chaos and confusion, the utopian would erect a neutral bureaucracy administering the rational social order. If the utopian bureaucratic state is administered by or entrusted to the wrong men, of course tyranny results. The utopian assumes the wrong men will not administer the state. However, as Northrup Frye so wryly puts it, to believe in such a proposition, "we shall have to believe in the perfectibility of intellectuals, which neither history nor experience gives us much encouragement to do" (Frye, 1966, p. 33).

Thus formal utopian writing has provided imagery for the social evolution of the comprehensive state for the last four centuries. It is this imagery, Davis would argue, which has led us to expect the state to solve our social problems (Davis, 1981, p. 9; cf. Lakoff, 1981, pp. 16, 20-21; Manuel, 1966, p. 85).

Clearly, the ideal state to one like Thomas More, who coined the term utopia, was not a future ideal toward which he saw society slowly moving. It was an informing instrument rather than an agenda for action. One constructed a "model of justice and common sense which, once established in the mind, clarifies its standards and values" (Frye, 1966, p. 3; Davis, 1981, p. 10). Disappointments in social policy results stem, in this case, from failure to erect utopian standards in terms of which sensible policy might be set and successfully implemented.

The development and regulatory oversight of broadcasting at the hands of the state furnishes a useful recent example of this phenomenon: the state's construction of a plan for implementing a new technology and disseminating it throughout the body politic. This plan assumes a specific set of values and implies a particular brand of politics--thus the importance of examining the discourse on broadcasting closely. As such the case of broadcasting furnishes a timely contemporary case study of the power and limitations of the state. It is also an important history lesson, given the current regulatory climate for removing the public interest phrase from the law governing telecommuncations and substituting in its place marketplace forces.

The introduction of broadcasting and its oversight by the modern state was the subject of much public discussion, both in Congress and in the press. People in the twenties responded to the new technology by constructing utopian-like futures in which

human perfectability was achieved. These utopian responses portray the new technology as (1) a means to bring about national and international unity, (2) a medium for establishing a new moral order, and (3) an instrument for effecting a rich interior life amidst an isolated arcadian landscape.

The Utopian Dream of Unity

The discourse on broadcasting is littered with utopian "statements"; in this case, they are utopian in the sense that they refer to unity. The greatest achievement of the burgeoning industry and art was thought to be national and international peace and unity, the welding of all humanity into an international community of good will. Hopes ran high that the power of instantaneous communications would conduce better understanding. Eventually this understanding through communication would effect the "much desired but long delayed era of universal peace" (Lodge, 1925, p. viii; see also pp. xi, 258-59; Harbord, 1928, p. 96; U.S. Congress, Senate, 1924, p. 9698; Hearings, 1923, p. 12).

The utopian world of perfect communion at the national and international level would come about partly through the creation, at the hands of radio, of a universal language. Either English or Esperanto would be established as the language common to all nations. In a broadcast over WRC, Laurens E. Whittemore of the Department of Commerce noted: ". . .radio is adding its stimulus to the demand for an international language of some sort."[1]

Through the medium of a common tongue, it was believed, soon "every part of humanity, every section of mankind, will have a better understanding of each other's outlook and ambitions and hopes. . ." (Lodge, 1925, p. 18; see also Aylesworth, 1928, p. 244).

Nor as time passed, did the enthusiasm for the possibilities radio presented wane. The new medium could do the impossible; it was in effect like the Greek who 'stalked calmly about his tub as the only fitting reply to the scoffers who had dialectically proven nothing could move" (Literary Digest, 1927, p. 23-25). Although beliefs that radio would cure disease or transmit psychic influence fell for the most part on deaf ears, beliefs that it would bring about universal communication and better understanding of other's hopes and dreams were eagerly received. That it seemed only to be annihilating geographical distance as a factor in transmission of messages did not prevent Hoover, his associates and others, from constructing all kinds of imaginative, as distinct from real, horizons. Like doubtful politicians, radio had no visible means of support; yet some men and women in the twenties voiced the belief that broadcasting could and would banish ignorance and prejudice.[2]

This vision of purposeful accomplishment expressed itself not only in broad terms of peace, understanding and the spread of ideas, but also in some practical, some curious, and some entertaining particulars. For example, enlarged communication through the radio, it was thought, would increase effectiveness

in industry and commerce. It would make possible universities of the air. It was an instrument capable of breaking down all language barriers. A by-product of the breakdown of language barriers would be the disappearance of the ambassador. Nations would speak directly to one another; misunderstandings and trouble would be cleared away by the close, direct communication made possible through the art of broadcasting.[3]

The value at the center of the utopian world wherein perfect communion among all members of the the human race is achieved is order rather than human fulfillment or human happiness. Conflict is minimized, harmony reigns; social cohesion is not subverted by individual hungers (Davis, 1981, pp.19, 375).[4] This goal of social harmony or perfect social unity goes back at least as far as Plato's Republic. However, in the centuries after the Scientific Revolution social harmony was "derived in part from a Newtonian view of the universe as an orderly, perfectly integrated system. . ."(Taylor, 1979, p. 62), a view which ironically ultimately generated a revolutionary social movement. The utopian, however, seeks complete and total harmony. He does so largely through the state's bureaucratic apparatus, machinery which dominates the individual. The argument goes something like this: since man is imperfect, man's institutions must become the instruments for achieving social cohesion. The bureaucratic, impersonal state regulates and moulds social performance (Davis, 1981, p. 40). In the case of broadcasting in the U.S.the

apparatus was supplied by the Department of Commerce initially and then by the Federal Radio Commission.

To the extent that order is the value sought in certain constructions of future worlds, then the kernal problem of utopia is power (Frye, 1966, p. 37; Brinton, 1966, p. 50; Davis, 1981, pp. 37, 38, 380; Ricoeur, 1979, p. 121). As such, writers treating the politics of utopia often argue that the politics of utopia is totalitarianism.[5] Unity, as Aristotle pointed out, is undesirable if it is total or perfect, since no one can disagree or be different. It is precisely this kind of unity that is called for, even if only implicitly so, in the discourse on broadcasting.

Thus one could argue that utopian schemes attached to broadcasting are authoritarian, since they stress harmony and the avoidance of conflict. Traditionally politics is associated with "competing interests and the resolution of conflict" (Taylor, 1979, p. 63). The conclusion, then, to be drawn from this strand of the discourse is that at bottom what was really sought was <u>the end of politics</u>. Whatever may be the case, ultimately if one dreams of perfect social harmony, then one must reject individualism, since individualism necessarily involves a conflict of interests (Taylor, 1979, p. 72).

Further, as Davis (1981, p. 387) cogently argues, the real threat of this particular vision of social order is its potential to eliminate the moral dimension of man. Not only does this brand of utopian dream involve the negation of possessive

individualism, the denial that the individual has rights in his own person, it is also the denial of the individual's claim to any irreducible moral responsibility. Those who seek a universe of harmony imply that men, given their flaws and human failings, might choose badly or selfishly. Moral chaos will result. The utopian urges freedom from this chaos and disorder. To remove disorder it is neccesary to remove choice. To remove choice is to remove responsibility for choice. Thus the discourse on broadcasting which bespeaks a desire for effecting social harmony also indicates a tacit desire to remove moral responsibility from the human dimension and to place it in the technological dimension.

The Utopian Dream of a New Moral Order

Parallel to this thrust towards removing moral responsibility from human hands, a second motif in the discourse would seek to establish a new moral commonwealth. Parenthetically, this desire for a perfect moral order implies again harmony and unity, since there would be no deviation from this moral standard. As a utopian form of thinking the perfect moral commonwealth fantasized collective salvation, one which was "terrestrial, imminent, total (utterly transforming life on earth, not merely to improve but to perfect)..."(Davis, 1981, p. 32). While existing social arrangements were more or less accepted, in this kind of utopian thought moral reformation of everyone, it was believed, would ultimately lead to harmony and

peace. This vision in formal utopian literature often presented itself in mystic and messianic terms. The kingdom would be established, it would be established on earth, but it would not be effected primarily through human hands (Taylor, 1979, p. 69; Davis, 1981, p. 27; Frye, 1966, p. 34).

The social function of this vision of a future society is to erect a static and unchanging moral standard. Social harmony and peace might be achieved by personal limitation and the individual's practice of virtue, but total regeneration could be had only through the action of an outside agent (Davis, 1981, pp. 31, 377). In the discourse on radio, this agent appears to be the new technology itself. In the following excerpt from the Congressional Record, radio is viewed as a means to preserve the American family. Representative Johnson of Texas recounts a recent trip to his district:

> Last fall, while visiting the various counties in the congressional district which I represent, I was impressed with the large number of radio receiving sets in that section of Texas. In every city, town, and village aerials were to be seen, and frequently on the roofs of isolated farm houses, indicating that they had availed themselves of this new invention and were in constant touch with the great outside world. Market reports, speeches--political and

> otherwise--sermons, concerts, baseball results--the world series was being played at that time--and a variety of information and entertainment was being daily and nightly enjoyed by the occupants of these homes. This is one invention that tends to keep people at home,and let us hope that it will aid in deepening and restoring the family circle so essential in the preservation of the American home.
>
> There is no agency so fraught with possibilities for service of good or evil to the American people as the radio. As a means of entertainment, education, information, and communication it has limitless possibilities.[italics added] (U.S. Congress, House, 1926, p. 5558)

Radio, then, was an instrument to promote the values of the American home and, by extension, the happiness of the entire human family (U.S. Congress, Senate, 1924, p. 7698). To some there was little doubt that broadcasting had "wiped out the isolation of millions of families" (U.S. Congress, Senate, 1924, p. 7698).

In his book on radio, Oliver Lodge (1925, p. 23-4) remarked:

> Hitherto life in the depths of the country has been felt by many to be isolated, dull, and monotonous; it ought not to be so,

> and would not be so if people were educated, so that they could appreciate the marvelous processes of Nature which were going on around them; they should be able to read and cultivate their minds even to greater advantage away from the distractions of town; but for the majority of people that is too much to expect, and accordingly there was a tendency to flock to the towns and to desert the country. There is some hope that that uneconomical and rather sad movement can now be stemmed.

Here broadcasting was viewed as a means to achieve a new intellectual order. This order in turn would lead (by whatever fractured logic) to a moral order. Hence, members of the human race would learn of their immortal existence:

> which cannot be really satisfied except by those faculties and emotions which from time to time, in the higher members of the race, have called forth spontaneous expression of worship, and which should arouse in all rational beings the feelings of wonder, love and praise (Lodge, 1925, p. 25).

Here Lodge's argument takes a curious turn from an economic argument--resumption of an agricultural-based economy--to a moral, religious one.

Thus broadcasting in various strands of the discourse becomes the deus ex machina, perhaps more appropriately the machina qua deus, the agent intervening in the course of human history. Rather than having the clear-cut outlines of most social blueprints, this one is vague and tenuously perceived (Davis, 1981, p. 36; Segal, 1980, p. 144). Rather, people tended to regard broadcasting as a sort of herald, the immediate forerunner of the perfect society. Radio was a young giant "destined to rule the future [applause]"(U.S. Congress, House, 1923, p. 2341). It was a new art of communication which, in the manner of the powerful, swept aside the limitations mere mortals had tried to impose upon it (Sarnoff, 1928, p. 3). To insure its stature, radio was associated with the giants of American history: Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. When social policy was being devised some raised the argument that regulation of heroes such as these would be unthinkable (U.S. Congress, House, 1923, p. 2352, 1926, p. 5492).

What was happening around the world was put in the context of American history, thus giving broadcasting further legitimation:

> In 1776 we were a wilderness folk and our letters were sent by messengers on foot. In 1926 we have chained the continents together, making the seas vast whispering galleries....It has been a marvelous record of progress, one never before equalled in the

> history of the world. It has been achieved by American initiative, energy and ability. . .[applause]. (U.S. Congress, House, 1926, p. 5492; see also pp. 5562-63)

The genius of Americans had created a power undreamed of heretofore, and that power projected "electric energy across continents and over seas" (U.S. Congress, House, 1926, p. 5478). Here the association between electric technology and power is being made--and in this scenario, the power is associated with good.

However, genius, like the giant, comes in two models: good and evil. While radio was seen as an instrument for good, for the most part, there were also some misgivings about it. In Congress, for example, Senator Howell argued for exercise of foresight in regulating radio, lest Americans wake up some day "to find. . .a Frankenstein's monster" (U.S. Congress, Senate, 1926, p. 12505; cf. p. 12504). Radio was a power for good and evil, for raising as well as lowering the moral order of the nation. Naturally, the consensus of opinion was that it should be used for the enhancement rather than the detriment of the moral life of the country (U.S. Congress, House, 1926, pp. 12451, 12452; Senate, 1926, p. 12500).

The evidence presented thus far suggests the perceived importance of technology in relation to the moral life of a group of people (Gouldner and Peterson, 1962, pp. xii-xiv). Those who dream of a moral universe partially if not largely wrought at the

hands of a communications technology, however, may wish to eliminate waste in moral effort. In the nightmare world they see around them, the utopian sentiment injects a moral certainty not found in the "real" world. For every intention there is a result, the mirror image of the original wish (Davis, 1981, p. 387). Laid bare, these utopian motifs in the discourse surrounding broadcasting at its birth may indicate "so many desperate attempts to build dams against the dark" (Hall, 1980, p. 127).

In this second strand of the discourse lies hidden the fears and misgivings of humankind in the decade just after the Great War and just before the the onset of the Great Depression. The evidence presented here may bespeak an implicit desire to end man's culpability for choice. Thus those who met the challenge of broadcasting at times saw it as an intervening instrument establishing a new moral commonwealth in which human perfectability was achieved, moral waste was eliminated, and social harmony reigned

The Utopian Dream of a Rich Interior Life

Very closely connected to this vision of a perfect moral order brought about by a new technology is a social fantasy which has had a long history in the United States and which recurs in the discourse on broadcasting. It devolves around the image of arcadia. It is connected to the perfect moral commonwealth in the sense that the frontier or wilderness was often thought of as

the locus for moral regeneration. The arcadian tradition is universal rather than merely American in its appeal: in one of his satires, for example, Horace examined the relative benefits of country versus city living (Satires, Bk. 2, VI). Although it appears to have been a universal mode of determining the assets and debits of social change, this tradition was exploited by colonial entrepreneurs in the seventeenth century who wished to entice men to the shores of the New World. Since that time, the arcadian image has figured prominently in American history. It is this deeply engrained imagery which informs Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia and Frederick Jackson Turner's classic essay on the American frontier (Jefferson, 1784; Turner, 1893).

Thus historically farming has been more than merely an economic condition; for Americans it has constituted a cultural value (Kasson, 1976, p. viii). In other words, historically the market base of the United States has enjoyed status as a cultural value as well. As with other instruments of social change, broadcasting was met with a certain amount of ambiguity and the discourse touching on it contains several appeals to the importance of the farmer, his way of life in American culture, and the role broadcasting would take in his intellectual and cultural enrichment.

One of the most intriguing points about this particular type of social blueprint is the assumption it makes about the compatibility between techne and what Daniel Bell called the

umwelt (Bell, 1973, p. 32). Many Americans, from the days of the Puritans to the end of the nineteenth century "saw no necessary conflict between nature and technology" (Segal, 1980, p. 145). The construction of roads and rails, the building of towns, the damming of streams were all accomplished through technology. Thus technology represented for some, instruments and acts of national fulfillment (Segal, 1980, p. 145). There was little difficulty in reconciling the worlds of nature and techne. Unlike their European counterparts, Americans assumed they could have it both ways: "they could continue to believe that limitless material progress, as represented by the image of machine power, was the appointed means by which the Republic would arrive at a unique state of harmony with nature" (Marx, 1980, p. 54; 1964; Segal, 1980, 146). They firmly believed they could blend successfully the Golden Age of bucolic peace with the growing industrial sector.

For later generations, of course, movement toward nature would represent a denial or negation of a highly industrialized and complex society (Marx, 1980, p. 65). Technology seemed by then to dominate a civilization crushed into compact, corroded and crowded cities (Pierce, 1966, p. 169). To these later generations the farm or commune represented bucolic simplicity: a society in which men were "engaged in a life that permitted the maximum of peace and leisure" (Frye, 1966, p. 41). Arcadia concerned the myth of origins, a secular aetiology; but the city concerned the telos, a secular teleology. Thus Arcadia is not a

city-dominated idealized version of collective life. As such the farm is the symbol of freedom, peace, and simplicity, whereas the city is the symbol of conscious design.

In the House and Senate, mention of the farmer generally was tied to his economic well-being. Discussion of broadcasting and the farmer concerned the convenience and necessity of receiving accurate, up-to-date market reports. In the following exchange between Senators Dill, Smoot and Copeland, the issue of taxing radio sets is connected to the needs of the nation's farmers:

> MR. DILL. Does the Senator think it is a luxury to the farmer who is getting market reports and weather reports tonight by radio?
> MR. SMOOT. The farmer who is using the radio gets such reports from the daily papers every day.
> MR. DILL. I wish to say to the Senator that there are literally thousands of farmers who can not get a newspaper, but who get reports through the air every night. Then the farmer buys a radio set.
> MR. COPELAND. But if we tax the radio set the farmer will have to pay more for it.
> (U.S. Congress, Senate, 1924, p. 7698)

Later Dill clinched his argument against taxation by appealing to the image of the isolated farmer. Saying that radio was not a

luxury but a necessity to people living in the country, he countered arguments that the farmer could get market reports from the daily newspapers by noting that the papers generally were delivered a day late to those in rural areas. The advantage of broadcasting, in this case at least, lay in its immediate transmission of information concerning market and weather reports (U.S. Congress, Senate, 1924, p. 7699; 1926, pp. 12498-99; House, 1926, p. 5584; cf. House, 1923, p. 2787). These reports were seen not merely as trivial additions to the household but as essential services for the economic well-being of the nation's agricultural-based community.

However, what began as an economic argument soon became a cultural one. Like the telephone and the telegraph before it, radio was thought of as a source of intellectual, aesthetic and emotional enrichment for isolated, rural communities. The farmer especially, who had been receiving weather reports via the wireless since at least 1914, would be able to broaden his circle of contacts (it was thought), a social benefit enjoyed by those who lived in the towns and cities which dotted the early American landscape. If isolation was an economic necessity, it no longer need be a social burden. News, concerts, music, lectures, and good drama would stimulate and interest the mind as well as fend off the feelings of loneliness caused by isolation. Radio would satisfy the curious who wonder what is going on in the world:[6]

> People living in remote country
> districts can now listen to the sound

> vibrations which are produced in any lecture or concert hall: and accordingly the entertainments of a town have become accessible to dwellers in remote valleys among the hills, or in the great plains of a continent.(Lodge, 1925. p. 23)

Thus broadcasting was viewed by some as a way for the farmer to have access to experiences hitherto denied to those who lived isolated in the country. In the process it tapped into a powerful, impassioned image of import to American culture: the farm. Although the city no longer was associated to the degree of yesteryear with the imagery of Babylon, den of iniquity, still the life of the farmer was the focus of immense sentimental attachment and broadcasting was viewed as a means to offset some of its social disadvantages. In particular , radio was envisioned as an instrument for satisfying the needs of a rich inner life, whether aesthetic, intellectual, political or religious.

Thus, in the third strand of the discourse, broadcasting is cast as an instrument which would effect social contact and consequently a rich interior life for those hitherto isolated in the countryside. Such is the central concern of utopian visions in the arcadian tradition: that man's interior life is properly subordinant to his material or economic concerns (Frye, 1966). While broadcasting was seen as an arm of economic or market well-being, it also was thought of as a means for enhancing human

experience, for creating a future society in which the costs exacted by the marketplace were exceeded by the spiritual benefits made possible through the intervention of a new technology.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have isolated three different though related blueprints enunciated about broadcasting at its birth. The first set of discourses spoke of human unity and worldwide peace, the second of a moral order and the third of cultural enrichment. All three placed an enormous power in the hands of the burgeoning technology. To conceive of a universe in which a technology has such power, I wish to argue, is to conceive of a world in which politics is no longer the order of the day. It is at heart a world in which human beings have retreated from choice, from responsibility for choice and from the arena wherein that choice is determined and subsequently implemented: politics. It signals, in short, the desire <u>to retreat from politics</u>.

> The idea of technology as the controlling agent of our destiny lends itself to such retreats from politics. To invest a disembodied entity like "The Machine" or "technology" [or broadcasting] with the power to determine events is a useful way to justify disengagement from the public realm

> and a reversion to inaction and privacy.(Marx, 1980, p. 69)

Further, it may be argued that the tendency to see a technology as an intervening force is a characteristic response to any change that is seen as a potential threat to the credibility of the dominant belief system. In this case, technology becomes a symbolic representation harbouring feelings of discontent. This discontent may be with the present political or moral order, but those who would displace these feelings in some sense feel threatened (Marx, 1980, pp. 67-8; cf. Gouldner and Peterson, 1962, p. xv).

Thus, while in the nineteenth century, the middle-class may have used technology as a powerful vehicle of ideology, a set of sacred-secular symbols for legitimating a laissez-fare creed (Segal, 1980; Kasson, 1976), the argument posed here is that by the 1920s this same set of symbols had become, at least for some, harbingers of political and moral discontent. This discontent largely placed a kind of power in the hands of the new technology: the power to bring about peace, harmony, human perfectability and enrichment. In such a universe, human choice would no longer be necessary. It may very well be that in the world of change and politics, the utopian-like response to broadcasting indicates a "consoling absolution from the painful complexity of human choice" (Marx, 1980, p. 69).

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